

## 'Romanian gypsies beware beware. Loyalist C18 are coming to beat you like a baiting bear' Text message sent by Combat 18 in Northern Ireland last week

Belfast was shocked by last week's assaults on Roma families. But in 'the Village, the loyalist enclave where anti-Romanian sentiment is strongest, even those who condemn the violence are bitterly opposed to immigration. By Henry McDonald

of South Belfast and stay out

of sight
"And then youse will be alright
"Get the boat and don't come back
"There is no black in the Union Jack
"Levalist C18" whatever it takes!"
The rhyming racist warning has been
picked up on mobile phones and computersacross loyalist areas of the north
of I reland since the start of last week
when the province hit the world headlines again for all the wrong reasons.
This weekend 10 Romanians, including many small children, some as young

ines again for all the wrong reasons. This weekend 110 Romanians, including many small children, some as young as six weeks, are under armed police guard at a secret location in Belfast. Sevendays agothe 20 Romanian families were driven out of several properties on the edge of the city's university district, victims of a racist gang which repeatedly attacked their homes over a number of days. Many of the immigrants, almost all exclusively from the Roma community, have said they want to return home rather than stay in a city being branded as the racist capital of Europe.

The three-storey houses off the Lisburn Road where the Romanians lived, with one family of 18 staring on a single floor, were empty on Friday afterndon. Windows were boarded up in one of the houses on Belgravia Avenue, while across the road, closer to Queen's University on Wellesley Avenue, there were still signs on the doors and windows of the attacks that drove them out.

Not very far away on Friday evening, in Bonegall Avenue, police officers were raiding three homes, arresting two teenagers from the "Villages", a working-class leyalist district wedged between the edge of the university and the MI motorway. They remain in custody this weekend. Others have gone into hiding as the Police Service of Northern Ireland comes under pressure to bring the stacks to so und and cross what the

city's lord mayor, Naomi Long, has called the "stain of shame" over Belfast. The "Village", with its long rows of Victorian terraced houses running down towards Windsor Park stadium, home of the Northern Ireland football team, has the Northern Ireland football team, has been for some time the pressure point for racism in the province. In April, 46 Polish nationals fled from their homes after a series of co-ordinated attacks. The orgy of violence was carried out by agangof loyalist youths in retaliation for the behaviour of Polish football hoofigans who started a riot outside Windsor Park before the Northern Ireland-Poland World Cup clash, which the home side won 3-2.

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Since the middle of the decade, foreign nationals from across the world
who have moved into the area have been
the target oflocal racists. First, it was the
Chinese whose homes were attacked,
then the Poles and Slovakians, and latterly the Roma. At the end of 2004 there
were an estimated 453 race hate crimes a
year reported to the PSNI across North-

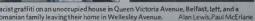
figure has risen to 1,000.

There are plenty of people in the "Village" who, while condemning violence, are openly hostile to immigrants. One middle-aged woman in Olympia Drive, at the back of Windsor Park, who refused to give her name, complained that there were too many foreigners in her area. "It was terrible putting wee children in danger, but they [the Romanians] are kiving on top of each other. They're beggingous ideshops and banks. Theysend their kids out to sell roses outside bars at night. They shouldn't be allowed to use their kids like that. They shouldn't even be allowed into the country because they don't want to work," she said.

Even along the prosperous Lisburn Road, with its restaurants, art galleries, organic cafes and boutiques, autitudes towards the Roma immigrants are negative; it is not difficult to find people who openly admit that they do not like the eastern Europeans in their midst.

Dressed in a dark business suit, Derek Orr said he was "sick and stred" of the





Roma. "You can't walk into a bank or shop on this road without a Romanian woman shoving a copy of the Big Issue under your nose or begging you for money. I don't mind the Poles and the Slovakians who come here. They work hard, harder than indigenous people from here, but all you see now are these Romanians begging and mooching about. We'd all be better off – them and us—if they went backto Romania or somewhere else in Europe," he said.

Even in the most deprived Protestant working-class redoubts, the far right remains electorally irrelevant. Nonethe-

## 'Every ethnic minority has been targeted over the past 10 years'

Anna Lo, assembly member

less, neo-Nazi micro-groups have been trying to exploit the upsurge in racist violence. One is the Ulster British People's party (UBPP), which is linked to a breakaway faction of the British National party. Following the campaign of vandalism and intimidation of the Roma families, the UBPP has bragged about further racially motivated violence ahead.

"The latest attack on Romanian immigrants in Belfast serves as evidence that the previous incidents were not isolated."

weekend. "It remains clear that the local population of Belfast are deeply discon-certed by the mass influx of immigrants, and by the looks of things, there will be more attacks to come unless something is done about the situation."